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ACTION WHA-00

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CA

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQ/PRISONER ABUSE; IRAQ;
MIDDLE EAST

IRAQ/PRISONER ABUSE

1. "Justice for Iraqis"

The centrist Winnipeg Free Press commented (5/5): "If the United States hopes to see democracy established in Iraq, it must ensure Iraqis can clearly understand that democratic American law and justice work differently from former dictator Saddam Hussein's law and justice. Abuse of prisoners by U.S. military personnel at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison threaten that perception.... Seven soldiers have so far been issued reprimands for their conduct and their treatment of Iraqi PoWs. That is not a sufficient response in the eyes of outraged Iraqis, appalled Americans, or U.S. allies. Maltreatment of prisoners will bring shame upon the U.S. war effort. Reasons why abuse was tolerated should be thoroughly investigated and the practice should cease immediately. The fundamental decency of

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the United States can be seen in the ferocity of the reaction to the news in Washington Mr. Rumsfeld said he was 'deeply disturbed' by the reports of actions that were 'completely unacceptable and un-American' and those who perpetrated them 'violated the code of military conduct and betrayed the trust placed in them by the American people.' More importantly, perhaps, they betrayed the trust of the Iraqi people, which is a far more serious thing. Mr. Rumsfeld's words would be more convincing if the news of the abuses had come first from an indignant defence department rather than through a leak to the media.... Americans know that in every barrel there will be a few bad apples. Iraqis need to be shown there are far more good ones than bad because their experience of government has been contrary to that. Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Powell need to put some teeth into their tough talk. Reprimands, letters going into service files, will not convince the Iraqis that democracy can make a difference. A full and public inquiry into the abuses at Abu Ghraib needs to be held immediately, those believed responsible must go before a military court and those convicted punished to the full extent that the military code allows. If there was ever a case for exemplary justice, this is one. Iraqis know that punishment for offences, real or imagined, under Saddam Hussein was swift and fierce. They need to see that justice in a free society can be both swift and fair."

2. "Brutal jailers must be curbed"

The middle-of-the-road Times Colonist commented (5/5): "Photographs of U.S. soldiers brutalizing and humiliating naked Iraqi prisoners have provoked, as they should, the 'deep disgust' of their commander-in-chief, George W. Bush.... Too many unacceptable things are done in the name of intelligence or security in the U.S. Canada's Maher Arar is not the only foreign-born national to be sent by U.S. agents back to Arab countries where torture is standard police procedure. Evidence of inhumane and degrading acts against detainees have emerged from a 'black hole' in Afghanistan run by U.S. forces; U.S. military doctors have said two deaths there were homicides. All this raises real concerns about what goes on in Guantanamo Bay where hundreds of Afghan prisoners are held incommunicado. Bush insists the actions of U.S. troops in Iraq are not 'systemic.' The world needs more proof of that than it's been given so far."

IRAQ

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3. "Bush taking pains to prove the Iraq War is not another Vietnam"

Under the sub-heading, "But telling parallels peek over the crest of the hill, despite the spin-doctoring," contributor Lorne Gunter commented in the left-of-center Edmonton Journal (5/5): "For reasons that will be obvious to everyone alive during the Vietnam War, the Bush administration is determined to stamp out any comparisons between America's current involvement in Iraq and the disastrous war in Southeast Asia that ended nearly 30 years ago.... But...one kind of inhumanity can lead to the other, if decency is permitted to leak unchecked out of soldiers, drop by

drop, without constant supervision, training and reinforcement of values by superiors. The more dangerous parallel on the matter of the recent tortures is that loss of public support, not among Arabs or western opponents of the war. Such groups are undissuadable from their opposition to this war. However, Nixon and Johnson were not tripped up by Vietnam because they lost the support of their natural political opponents. They lost their presidencies because they lost the support of their friends and their mission's natural allies. These tortures threaten to make it impossible for American supporters of the Iraq war to continue voicing their support - that's the true parallel with Vietnam. There are other similarities peeking over the crest of the hill, too. The effect of war debt on the American and world economies; the failure of 'Iraqification' of the military, police and institutions of state, and the lack of a clear 'exit strategy' - American goals keep changing. But the most apt comparison may be the loss of the will to fight to win. America hasn't lost the will in Iraq, yet. But the ceasefire in Fallujah last month, followed by the re-arming of elements of Saddam's army to quell the city, rather than an all-out American victory, sends troubling signs of indecision and softening commitment. Iraq isn't Vietnam. But Vietnam only became Vietnam after the Americans lost their desire to win and couldn't craft a way to get out."

MIDDLE EAST

4. "Sharon and Bush step toward a solution"

Former IV grantee and professor of political science at Simon Fraser University, Alexander Moens observed in the left-of-center Vancouver Sun (5/5): "The Ariel

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Sharon-George W. Bush approach to the Israeli-Palestinian problem flies in the face of conventional wisdom. It holds that the only way to a peace settlement is to pressure Israel endlessly to end its 'occupation' and explain away Palestinian attacks. Instead, Bush and Sharon are inching their way towards practical gains for both sides despite international condemnation.... The first right step reached both in Israel and Washington was to draw the logical conclusion from Yasser Arafat's rejection of the 2000 Camp David offer for peace.... Virtually alone, the Bush administration got it about right. It respected the Israeli election when in February 2001 Israeli voters turned from Ehud Barak to Ariel Sharon. It was not Israel that needed to do more, but the Palestinians that needed to show what they really wanted. If Palestinian leaders did not believe that more terrorist violence would eventually force Israel to make even larger concessions, the onus was on them to show it.... The second step Bush got right was putting Arafat on notice, telling him to condemn suicide attacks and move decisively to stop them or lose American support.... After a year of trying to get Arafat to realize the onus was on him to show good faith, Bush made the third right move. In June 2002, he called for new Palestinian leadership. The only reason, I suspect, that the world did not automatically condemn Bush's proposal was because he stunned his critics by calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state. This idea brought the European Union and others back to the table and forced Arafat to appoint Mahmoud Abbas, a moderate prime minister. Then at the summit meeting in Jordan, in June 2003, Bush showed willingness to move quickly with Abbas and Sharon to work out a three-year deal, culminating in a Palestinian state. While Israeli defence forces were redeploying, as agreed in Jordan, massive suicide attacks killed scores of Israeli citizens. Abbas resigned and the Road Map seemed destroyed, but Bush has not given up on his goal. Then Sharon and Bush took another controversial step. If Palestinian leaders had only one response to all American and Israeli proposals (more suicide bombings) and thus could do nothing good for the Palestinian people, Bush would not condemn unilateral Israeli moves to protect their own people,

including the construction of the new security fence. The straw that broke the camel's back was Sharon's decision to dismantle all Israeli settlements in Gaza

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and some in the West Bank. Israeli withdrawals had been demanded by world opinion for decades, but now that Sharon did it on his own, it was widely condemned. Despite the world's dislike of both men, Sharon and Bush have taken real steps towards a workable solution."

5. "Pampered princes: Despite attacks on oil workers, Saudis will be treated with kid gloves"

Former diplomat Harry Sterling wrote in the right-of-center Calgary Herald (5/5): "Last Saturday's terrorist attack against western technicians in Saudi Arabia is a grim reminder of an inescapable reality in that oil-rich Middle East nation.... Islamic extremists, Washington's power brokers have continued to treat the Saudi regime with kid gloves. The reason for that is the Bush administration's desire not to undermine Saudi stability, since it is the largest oil producer and controls enormous petroleum reserves. (The Persian Gulf region possesses two-thirds of proven oil reserves.) Although the U.S. imports only 15 per cent of its petroleum from Saudi Arabia, any major instability in the kingdom and its oil-producing neighbours could have extremely serious economic fallout at a time when the world requirement for oil is steadily increasing due to China's phenomenal economic development. Thus, while the U.S. gets much of its own oil imports from Canada (18 per cent), Mexico and Venezuela, disruption of oil production in Saudi Arabia would have global fallout, potentially damaging many economies, including the American. (The Saudi royal family also are major investors in the U.S. Their withdrawal from the U.S. market could have incalculable consequences.) While such practical considerations of U.S. national interests make sense to the Bush administration, such realpolitik is of little concern to Saudi dissidents. Although Crown Prince Abdullah tried to appease them by having Washington withdraw its troops from the kingdom, for Islamic extremists, such gestures come too late. They no longer want just the so-called infidels out of the kingdom. They want to overthrow the Saudi royal family as well and impose an even stricter form of Wahhabi Islamic fundamentalism...."

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